

INDIVIDUAL THERAPY

What is individual therapy?

Individual therapy is a psychotherapy implemented by a trained mental health therapist to help a client work through a problem. The ways that **individual therapy** is implemented varies widely depending upon the psychological problem experienced by the client, the personal beliefs and practices of the therapist, and the individual needs of the client.

The first session will usually involve you and your psychologist “getting to know” one another. Your psychologist will ask questions about you and your past experiences, current situation, family, job and friends. Your psychologist will not push you to delve into private matters, but does need to obtain enough information about your individual needs in order to determine a course of treatment. In some cases, the problem will be quite evident to both you and your therapist (e.g. if you are anorexic and are seeking help to fight it). However, in some cases there may be an underlying issue you are not aware of (e.g. you may be depressed, anxious or angry without knowing why).

It is important for your psychologist to assess the problem and decide the best plan of action. The first step is to determine *what* the problem is. Once you and your psychologist have both developed an awareness of the situation, you can start to work together to determine *why* the problem is present. From here, your therapist will implement a program to assist you in solving the problem.

Remember that, although your psychologist may be directing the sessions, you are the one in control. If you feel that the therapy should take a different direction, discuss this with your psychologist. He or she has selected a program to best suit your needs, but will still be very responsive to any feedback that you have. However, keep in mind that mental health therapists are highly trained professionals that have a lot of experience in their field. By trusting that your therapist has your best intentions in mind, you will benefit more from the therapy.

Therapist-client relationship

One of the key ingredients of success in psychotherapy is the strength and stability of the relationship between the client and the therapist. Therefore it is very important that you are comfortable and happy with your therapist.

Therapists that are rigid, critical and uninvolved are less effective. As you can imagine, talking to someone who you dislike and who seems to be judgmental will not do you much good. You will not want to attend sessions and you will be less likely to follow advice.

Qualities to look for in a psychologist include warmth, empathy, patience, genuineness, honesty and the ability to be upfront yet caring at the same time. These qualities help

the client achieve the important goal of self efficacy. Clients that have self-efficacy are clients that believe in themselves, the therapy and the counselor. When you trust that the therapy is helping, you are more likely to actively work on therapy goals, and are therefore more likely to experience the benefits of the treatment.

One of the most important aspects of psychotherapy is communication. Choose a therapist you feel very comfortable talking to. Obviously when you meet a person for the first time it is very hard to tell whether or not you are going to be able to communicate effectively with them, but if you focus on the qualities listed above, you are likely to open up to them as the sessions continue.

Therapy goals

In every type of psychotherapy, the counselor will help you develop specific goals for the therapy. This will include a broad overall goal as well as more focused goals that may change from session to session. Breaking the overall goal into session-by-session objectives helps to focus on specific parts of the program and make sure all aspects are properly covered. It also makes it easy to identify which specific parts you are having difficulty with and what you need to work on more. Keeping the overall goal in mind will help you get past times when you feel like giving up on the therapy. To keep focused and consistent with the therapy, remember to keep visualizing yourself overcoming your difficulty.

Your therapist will also help you to:

- **Identify coping strategies:** These may be coping strategies that have helped you in the past. Your psychologist will teach you to adapt these strategies to your current situation. If your coping strategies have been unsuccessful in the past, your therapist will guide you in the development of new ones.
- **Rearrange life priorities:** Sometimes people have psychological problems because they have an irrational expectation of themselves and others. This increases the pressure on everyone and can lead to stress, anxiety and depression. By rearranging your expectations and priorities you may be able to avoid unnecessary stress.
- **Focus on meaningful pursuits.**
- **Identify personal strengths:** Sometimes during times of psychological crisis it is easy to focus on your weaknesses and what you do not have, instead of your strengths and the wonderful things you do have. Psychologists will draw your attention to positive aspects about yourself, and help you